



**KENTUCKY DEPARTMENT OF FISH & WILDLIFE RESOURCES
TOURISM, ARTS AND HERITAGE CABINET**

Steven L. Beshear
Governor

#1 Sportsman's Lane
Frankfort, Kentucky 40601
Phone (502) 564-3400
1-800-858-1549
Fax (502) 564-0506
fw.ky.gov

Marcheta Sparrow
Secretary

Dr. Jonathan W. Gassett
Commissioner

Kentucky Dept. of Fish and Wildlife Resources News

White-nose syndrome spreads in Kentucky

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Sunni Carr

1-800-858-1549 ext. 4446

FRANKFORT, Ky. – The Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources has detected white-nose syndrome in bats at three Breckinridge County caves.

Three common species – the Northern long-eared, tri-colored and little brown bat – have tested positive for white-nose syndrome, a disease of hibernating bats caused by the fungus *Geomyces destructans*.

The caves, located northeast of Hardinsburg, are within a 20-mile radius of each other. The caves are privately owned and not open to the public.

Confirmation of the disease was recently made by personnel at the Southeastern Cooperative Wildlife Disease Study in Athens, Georgia.

Biologists are still assessing caves within the area to determine the extent of the infection. “Caves are very abundant in this particular area of the state and we are working diligently to canvas all known sites,” said Sunni Carr, Wildlife Diversity Coordinator for the department.

With winter surveys just getting underway, it is unknown if there are more infected sites yet undetected in the state. Employees of Kentucky Fish and Wildlife and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service have been working collaboratively on local surveillance and monitoring of the disease since it was first detected in New York state in 2006.



“By having a state white-nose syndrome response plan in place, it has allowed us to quickly coordinate surveillance of known hibernacula,” said Brooke Hines, state bat ecologist for Kentucky Fish and Wildlife. “Local grottos (caving clubs) have been a tremendous help with this endeavor.”

“We have assisted Kentucky Fish and Wildlife for many years with cave surveys,” noted Glenn Driskell, a caver with the Fort Knox Grotto.

Last winter, department biologists surveyed approximately 100 caves throughout the state as part of its intense monitoring protocol. At the end of the survey season, white-nose syndrome was confirmed in a cave located in Trigg County, in southwestern Kentucky. This was the first documentation of the disease in the state.

Although white-nose syndrome is not a threat to humans, pets or livestock officials are still working to educate anyone who may enter a cave on the proper decontamination protocol. Decontamination helps to prevent human movement of the disease throughout the landscape. Ways that people can help reduce the risk of accidental spread of the disease can be found online at the website of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service at www.fws.gov/whitenosesyndrome/cavers.html.

White-nose syndrome is estimated to have killed between 5.7 million to 6.7 million cave-dwelling bats in eastern North America. Mortality rates of bats have reached almost 100 percent in caves infected for several years. Infections have been confirmed in 16 states, mostly in the eastern U.S., and four Canadian provinces.

ADDITIONAL MEDIA CONTACT:

Ann Froschauer
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
(413) 253-8356
ann_froschauer@fws.gov

The Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources manages, regulates, enforces and promotes responsible use of all fish and wildlife species, their habitats, public wildlife areas and waterways for the benefit of those resources and for public enjoyment. Kentucky Fish and Wildlife is an agency of the Tourism, Arts and Heritage Cabinet. For more information on the department, visit our Web site at fw.ky.gov.